

The University of Chicago
Libraries





*Fellowship in
Thought and
Prayer*

BY

BASIL MATHEWS
& HARRY BISSEKER



Fellowship in Thought and Prayer

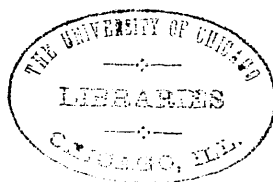
Fellowship in Thought and Prayer

BY
BASIL MATHEWS, M.A.
AND
HARRY BISSEKER, M.A.

THIRD EDITION

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

12/12/11
A143



81

1001701

chg.
6

Contents

	PAGE
PREFACE	ix
I.—FELLOWSHIP	13
II.—FELLOWSHIP IN THOUGHT AND PRAYER	31
III.—THE TEST OF EXPERIENCE	73
IV.—FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION	91

500000

Preface

THERE is one problem which reasserts itself in every age—that of the Church's comparative impotence in face of the immensity of her undertaking. In no generation, perhaps, has this problem been more acutely felt than to-day. On the one hand, the opportunities confronting the Church appear to be so fleeting, and of such immeasurable strategic importance, and, on the other hand, the limitations by which she is beset are at once so numerous and so baffling in their character, that some who have long believed in her mission have at last begun to waver in their loyalty.

It is a notable fact that the hour which has thus brought doubt and perplexity to many has for others witnessed the dawn of a new hope. In different parts of the world thousands of

men and women, chiefly to be found among the rising generation, have gained a fresh and exultant confidence in God and in the abiding reality of His guidance. This deepening of their faith has come to them as they have practised a special mode of approach to Him—the path of fellowship in thought and prayer. The principles on which this method is based are as old as Christianity itself, but it would probably be true to say that in the particular application which they have now received they have been invested with a new and a larger significance.

The present little volume seeks to expound both the method itself and the principles on which it rests. It has been written in the first place to meet an immediate need. Among those who have learnt to value the method there is a widespread desire to possess a considered statement of the vital truths which it embodies—partly, that it may be available for their own further consideration and use, and partly that friends who are about to join a Fellowship-group for the first time may be invited to read it beforehand in preparation for the gatherings in which they are to engage.

Such a statement, at the request of others, the writers have here attempted to furnish. To this original motive for their task they have ventured to add a second—the hope that a description of the mode of fellowship concerned may bring it to the notice of some to whom it might otherwise remain unknown. There is no group of Christian people—whether a Church, a Sunday School, or any other type of religious society—by whom its principles could not be adopted and applied. And there is none, we are bold enough to suggest, to whom it does not offer the hope of a new inspiration and a new progress.

As some descriptive term is a necessity, we have referred to the practice of corporate thought and prayer as a “method.” The repeated use of such a term, however, inevitable as it appears in these pages, renders us liable to one misunderstanding against which we desire to guard ourselves at the outset. It is in no sense our intention to imply that any “method” contains within itself the way to religious revival. The way to revival, considered from the human side, must always be that of fidelity to inward, spiritual principles. We have only one reason, as we claim only one justification, for attaching

emphasis to this particular method. It has proved in experience its peculiar power to foster the fidelity in question and to provide, for those who seek to practise it, a singularly favourable sphere for its exercise.

In the preparation of this volume we have received help of special value from the Rev. Canon E. W. Barnes, D.Sc., F.R.S., Master of the Temple, and from the Rev. Will Reason, M.A., though neither of these gentlemen is to be regarded as responsible for any of its detailed statements. For their generous encouragement and assistance we offer them our sincere gratitude.

B. M.

H. B.

Chapter One: Fellowship

"The lack of Fellowship is hell."

—WILLIAM MORRIS.

I

FELLOWSHIP, like all elemental things, defies definition. Its subtle and powerful essence escapes through the closest mesh of words. Those who have in any full sense shared intimate fellowship will feel a disappointing inadequacy at any attempt to express its reality. The power of fellowship in life, its transforming influence in personality, and its revolutionary moral power can never be conveyed by any form of words to those who have not shared it.

At root, fellowship is a living intercourse between personalities. It is such an intercourse charged through and through with both freedom and love, and kept active by a common aim. Love is at once the tether of the comradeship and the stimulus of its corporate life in pursuit of the quest. Freedom is the "wind on the heath" of fellowship, keeping the affection of the Round Table from becoming stale or stagnant or oppressive.

14 *Fellowship in Thought and Prayer*

Fellowship, then, is an active comradeship between personalities, men or women or both, who unite with one another in a common worship, or battle for a common quest, or play their game for the honour of a team, or pool their separate thoughts in constructing and carrying into effect a single plan, or who simply share the needs and desires of a common humanity. "These are the ties which, though light as air, are as strong as links of iron." *

At its highest expression fellowship comes to men and women the tethers of whose love for one another enlarge rather than shackle the freedom of their minds, and whose common confidence in and loyalty to one another give to each the power of the "backing" of all, and to all the collected stimulus and invention of each. Fellowship, in short, is all that divine and human commerce between souls which makes a number of separate men into a living group. In fellowship they pull together like a team tugging the wagon of life forward. They move together like a boat's crew swinging as one man in a disciplined unity of will to win their race. A

* Burke. Speech on moving his Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies, 1775.

group in real fellowship has, in fact, many of the qualities of a personality. Through the power of fellowship separate personalities blend in a society of friends that has an identity, a characteristic quality, and a power of concerted action that increase the potentialities of each individual.

Fellowship in this large sense has all the richness and breadth of the almost untranslatable Greek word *Κοινωνία*. Under the power of such fellowship all that each man owns becomes literally "common wealth"; they have in fact "all things in common"—not merely goods and chattels and food, but ideas and ambitions, projects and crusades.

The story of man is full of the revolutions in human conditions made by the power of such fellowship exercised in groups of men. Such groups have often centred in the attractive and compelling power of some personality dedicated to an idea. Yet that personality itself is the creation as often as it is the creator of fellowship. In fact, fellowship rarely takes permanent form unless the compelling force that draws the men together is greater than any human personality. The cohesive power is normally exercised by

loyalty to an idea or co-operation in a steadily pursued plan or a common worship.

Great movements in the world's history, associated as they are in the popular conception with the leadership of some powerful personality, can generally be traced in origin to the seed plot of some group of men whose fellowship in thought and often in prayer has itself been the nursery of that man's power of great leadership. John Woolman moving in his circle in America, and Wilberforce with his friends in England, debated and developed those germinal ideas which destroyed on the battlefields of America and in the Parliament of Britain the slavery that was arraigned first at the judgment bar of the Christian conscience. John Henry Newman, in concert with the flaming souls of Hurrell Froude and the others of their group, nursed and fanned the sparks that blazed out in the Oxford Movement. Mazzini and his comrades proclaimed and fought for the twin doctrines of nationality and liberty that now begin to govern the world. The Gottesfreunde similarly prepared the mind of Teutonic Europe for the stormy message of Luther. The Holy Club meeting in Wesley's

room in Lincoln College toughened the fibre and speeded and strengthened the indomitable wills that transformed England. Francis of Assisi with his group of Poor Brothers gave Europe such a vision of the divine light on earth as she had not seen before nor has witnessed since. And above all stands that first Fellowship which moved through the villages of Judæa and by the cornfields and lake side of Galilee and then went out to "turn the world upside down."

These examples that leap to the memory illustrate the irresistible power of fellowship working in men who are so welded to one another by a common loyalty to a great idea that they have one will, one faith, and one divine ambition. In them we discover that the leader is essentially the voice of the fellowship ; we realise the truth of Bishop Brent's declaration that " the leader is simply the foremost companion."

In the quickening atmosphere of such confident and intimate fellowship, where

Thought leaps out to wed with thought
Ere thought can wed itself with speech ;

and where men's separatist rivalries and com-

peting ambitions are annealed and welded into a loyal common pursuit of a single quest, we discover the principle of moral co-operation in redeeming the world.

Nothing, however, is more fatal to fellowship than uniformity among those who compose it, or complete agreement in their views.

The fallacy that a group is best when it consists of men or women of one type of mind or similarity in outlook is perilous. Uniformity of temperament or agreement in all opinion makes fellowship anæmic and flaccid. Fellowship is at once tested and strengthened by the pooling of divergent views and the coalescing of varied personalities. The brilliant and glorious strength, the rich, full-blooded vitality of the first Christian fellowship, lay in the fact that the team of the twelve included such personalities as Andrew the gentle but persistent, Peter the impetuous but uncertain, the mystical yet aggressive Sons of Thunder, Thomas the sceptical logician and Matthew the dedicated business man. Indeed one cause of the anæmia and dulness that paralyse much of our modern fellowship lies on one side in the fact that we draw in the cautious Thomases and shrewd

Matthews, but tend to freeze out the other types by questioning the good taste of the volcanic and explosive Peter (coming in too with the smell of fish on his linen !) and by agreeing that after all John, amiable dreamer as he is, is "not what we should call practical."

But in reality, that "infinite variety" is the very fountain of power in fellowship when it is caught up into the vital unity of a common leader and a single quest. And that diversity in unity finds superb power and immortal validity when the loyalty is given to the Son of God and the single quest is the campaign for His world kingdom. It is then—and only then—that the horizon of the fellowship is ultimate and the resources of its power are infinite. The supreme fellowship is the Christian Fellowship.

If fellowship, then, is rooted in intercourse but does not involve either uniformity of type or identity of opinion, what normally is the basis on which the intercourse proceeds? As a rule it is rooted and grows from a common spiritual experience which issues in a common determination to achieve a certain aim. To examine the fellowships that we have given as examples, the groups which created and carried through

the Franciscan Movement, the Methodist Revival, the Oxford Movement, the Anti-Slavery Campaign, and the Young Italy Campaigns, is to discover in them all those qualities of a common spiritual experience and quest. In every case differences are many and divergence of view is pronounced ; but unity regulates and controls the differences.

The glory of the gift of fellowship lies in the fact that, while action is based on the discovered and experienced unity, thought becomes fullest and most fruitful when it audaciously explores the territories of difference. To penetrate without flinching through those dreaded places of divergence has proved again and again, as Livingstone discovered when he crossed the great Desert, that the land which men had always declared to be a desert turned out to be a whole continent " full of great rivers and many trees." In particular, it has been proved most richly that to Christian folk who keep their hearts quick to the ultimate fact of their unity in Christ it is possible to explore to their farthest depths those forests of difference which have kept men apart, and to discover that, after all, the solution of our divergences will be reached,

not by surrendering our sacred convictions, but by discovering a higher, richer, more glorious and hitherto unsuspected synthesis. And the unifying power by which that synthesis is reached is always personal fellowship in a real experience of Christ.

In contradiction to the view here held that the only ultimate and immortal fellowship is the Christian fellowship, it may indeed be argued that in the day of crucifixion the fellowship was broken. The men who had been bound to one another in Jesus fled separately into the darkness. One of the fellowship left Him at the very communion service of fellowship—the common meal—and betrayed Him by the very symbol of fellowship—a kiss. Another lied with oaths and curses, saying that he had never spoken to the Man.

What seems to be the contradiction of our faith in the finality and ultimate power of Christian fellowship is, in fact, its seal and confirmation. For when that cursing denier cried “I go a-fishing,” the others said “We go with thee”; and in the dawn they found Him and He found them. On that tideless shore they were chained for ever to Him and each other by

22 *Fellowship in Thought and Prayer*

the love that would not let them go. They were joined in that immortal Fellowship of the Living Lord which has since that day penetrated to every shore and of which we ourselves are free.

II

The strength of fellowship reposes, then, on the fact that to men of limited view and partial capacity immense enrichment at once of personal power and of corporate action comes from sharing their thought and their prayer in dedication to a common aim. But, although the feebleness and relative futility of individual men are thus swallowed up in the larger powers of corporate thought and action, the actual desire for fellowship is not a product of the weakness of men ; it is rooted in the very being and nature of God. " God," as Madame Guyon has said, " has an infinite desire to communicate Himself." Indeed the very heart of the supreme Act of God in giving Himself in Christ was His desire to reconcile to Himself the estranged faces of men—in a word, His aim was fellowship. God lives in fellowship, for God is Love.

That picture gallery of the nature of God—the parables—is just a series of windows into the heart of fellowship. The central idea of the shepherd in leaving the ninety and nine for the one is to complete the fellowship. The distinction between the hireling and the Good Shepherd is that the former cares nothing and the latter will give everything for the fellowship. The climax of the story of the prodigal son is the restoration of fellowship ; and the damning sin of the otherwise blameless elder brother is that he refuses to join in it. The growth of the Kingdom is like leaven. The final seal on discipleship is that the men have climbed from the status of a bonds slave to the standard of the friend : they have entered into fellowship. The whole story of the Gospels, indeed, is the record of the training of a fellowship that found in the Fatherhood of God the supreme authority for and source of the fellowship of His sons.

The experience of the full richness of fellowship is, however, far from demanding that men shall always dwell in companionship. Fellowship is the contradiction, not of solitude which is the quietness where blooms of fellowship are matured into the fruits of personality, but of

isolation which is the very death-chamber of character. A man who isolates his life puts it in a refrigerating cell ; he sterilizes it ; it can neither grow nor reproduce its life. But a man who leaves his fellows in order to dwell in solitude with God is discovering the richest gift that he can bear back in his hands to the fellowship. What Paul found in the solitude of the desert of Arabia he poured out in glorious abundance for thirsty men in Antioch and Ephesus, in Athens, Corinth and Rome. Christ on the lonely mountain drew on the Infinite Resources for the life of the whole fellowship of men.

Our definition of fellowship as living intercourse, however, involves that it can only exist where there is reciprocity. To give to men is not to have fellowship with them. Fellowship of the order that bridges all divisions of race and social status and sex is not made even by giving the most heroic, persistent and philanthropic service. We may die for men or give royally, yet may fail to create the one thing that they are starving for if we do not give ourselves in fellowship ; if we do not share as well as give. The paradoxes of St. Paul's song of love are all

based on this fact that to preach or give money or even go to the stake are not in themselves fellowship. "You have given your goods to feed the poor," said Bishop Azariah, speaking for the people of India and addressing men and women of other races who cared supremely for India. "You have given your bodies to be burned. We would ask for love. *Give us friends.*"

This fact that human life is not fed save on such fellowship, and that fellowship comes through sharing and not merely giving, is restated vividly in Lowell's "The Vision of Sir Launfal"; where Christ, discovered by Sir Launfal in the leper with whom the knight has shared bread and water by a stream, says :

The Holy Supper is kept indeed
In what so we share with another's need.
Not what we give but what we share
For the gift without the giver is bare.
Who gives himself with his gift feeds three,
Himself, his hungering neighbour and ME.

Fellowship, then, is impossible apart from personal intercourse on a common footing. We believe that there is, when we get down to the bed-rock realities of life, no common footing to be discovered in the fact of being human. The

brotherhood of man (biologically, anthropologically, ethnologically man) simply does not exist either in his history or his make-up or his prospects. Inter-class prejudices and diversities, international differences and distastes, inter-racial antipathies and even loathings make it impossible to secure a common footing there. "Experience leads me to the conviction," said Sir Sydney Olivier on the basis of experience as Governor of Jamaica, where the problem of the relationship of white and black is a permanent pre-occupation of statesmanship, "that there is no basis for inter-racial relationship save on a spiritual plane." That is to say, there is no real basis for real fellowship on a world scale save on a spiritual plane. Men, in a word, are not brothers by birth in the human sense ; they are brothers by new birth in the super-human sense. Their brotherhood finds absolute and enduring reality only in a spiritual parentage—in a word, in the Fatherhood of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That common sonship found in sharing the sonship of Jesus Christ does in fact—and not in rhetoric—form the one permanent foundation of world-fellowship.

On the increasing practice of fellowship, in the sense of the triumph of unity over discord between nations and races, in sober fact the future of that world depends. For such fellowship beginning as it does between individual men finds a fuller operation between groups and organisations, between clans and nations and races. The whole story of human progress is, in this aspect, the dramatic record of the gradual substitution of higher forms of unity for division. So inter-tribal fighting and clan war die as the unity develops the clans into the nation or the tribes in the race. And the crucial issue of our own century is simply and centrally whether the principle of fellowship embodied in a world-league of nations and of races is or is not to supersede that lack of fellowship which (as William Morris has said) means hell, and has meant between nations in our own day a hell of inextinguishable anguish.

We have been forced by the frightful logic of war to recognise that the erection of the solitary ambition of one empire above the general right of all nations is on the international scale the precise equivalent of lack of fellowship between individual men ; and that just that failure in

fellowship between nations involved humanity in the maiming and destruction of the flower of its young life and in the intolerable agony of war. But that international complex of antagonisms, that uneasy balance of armed power defending competing interests, is simply the expression in the field of international affairs of the inter-class antagonisms, the commercial rivalries, the civic jealousies, the interdenominational distrusting, and the personal bickerings that hold considerable sway in the national, ecclesiastical, local and individual life.

The central aim of the new world, then, is the increase of fellowship. The supreme need of men of all races is that they should share, not formal agreements that may be torn up, not superficial delimitations of influence that simply secure a temporary and uneasy peace through separation by railings and fences ; but a growing fellowship of rich intercourse. The ultimate salvation of the world lies in the practice of that Christian fellowship which will alone bridge inter-racial gulfs and inter-class chasms.

To that end we need, first, fellowship within the Church and between the Churches, for, literally, fellowship is the life-blood of the

Christian Church. It is the pulsating arterial flow which sets all the limbs of her immortal body tingling with divine vitality and vigour, and fits her for the service of man and the glory of God. We need fellowship between capital and labour, for there alone lies the hope—and it is a rich hope—of building up a national life in which each class shall give its service for the strength and joy of the whole. Superlatively the call comes for fellowship between races of all colours. For in a world literally made one by the miracles of physical science applied to communication and transport, and made helpless against those miracles of science applied to the slaughter of men, there is no alternative to a growing fellowship of mutual understanding save a swift and ghastly increase of inter-racial rivalry in trade ambitions and labour jealousies. Such rivalry will precipitate humanity over the precipice of universal war into the abyss of barbarism, where men will cringe in helpless terror and in unavailing remorse amid the ruins of a world whose rich heritage might have been saved by the practice of fellowship.

The supreme need of the world, then, is to replace the competing rivalries of hate by the

generous rivalries of Christian fellowship on every plane of human life—individual, commercial, religious, between the classes, international, and lastly, but supremely, inter-racial. Only so can the world escape, not only further degradation and the agony of greater wars, but the ultimate ruin of ordered and humane life. Beginning in the individual and working upward and outward it is essential that comity should replace conflict, that fellowship should rule in every sphere of life, and that the irresistible authority of an alliance of nations working in moral co-operation should plan and erect, assailable yet impregnable, the walls of the City of God.

Chapter Two : Fellowship in Thought and Prayer

THE preceding chapter has represented fellowship as at once our goal and our way. If human life is to escape the perils which threaten it and to attain the ideal for which we believe it to have been created, perfect fellowship on earth—that is to say, fellowship complete alike in its range and in its intensity—is the end at which we must aim. But the means to that end will be found in the more limited fellowship at present available. It is as we practise such fellowship as is already possible to us that we shall both discern the path to its wider application and be strengthened to achieve its ultimate fulfilment.

During recent years this conviction has profoundly influenced the thought and action of many of the most ardent spirits within the Christian Church. Deeply impressed by the gravity of the world-situation and by the Church's comparative failure to furnish guidance and inspiration, they have found a new hope in the Christian teaching on the potency of fellowship. It was in the practice of fellowship

that the early Christians, confronted in their own generation by the most perplexing problems of truth and conduct, obtained the wisdom and spiritual reinforcement needful for their solution. Persuaded that the same source of light and strength is still accessible, groups of men and women have been meeting together and facing the present critical situation with passionate intensity of thought and feeling. In consequence, their entire outlook has been transformed. Truths long received in theory have acquired a new emphasis and reality, and so large and increasing is the influence of the altered attitude, among both the younger ministers and the younger laymen of nearly all Christian communities, that it has begun to assume a real significance for those who seek to discern the signs of the times.

It is now our task to attempt its delineation. The endeavour is in one sense foredoomed to failure. For the change is pre-eminently a change of spirit, and a spirit can rarely be captured and imprisoned in cold words: only through actual contact with it can its power be adequately realised. What has taken place is that men and women have begun to see

a vision and to experience a passion, and these things defy portrayal by means of paper and ink. All that is possible, therefore, is a brief description of the temper and attitude in which they have resulted, and of the method of fellowship by which they have been attained.

I

The starting-point is found in a fresh recognition—so vivid and powerful as to constitute almost a re-discovery—of three of the Church's age-long convictions.

The first of these is the belief in the Divine sufficiency. Admittedly, the Church is far too weak of herself to satisfy the manifold and bitter need of the world. For this, God, and God only, is sufficient. But that He *is* sufficient is not merely a beautiful theory : it is a most real and practical fact on which we must learn to count with a more simple directness. Though we ourselves neither are nor ever can be equal to the situation that confronts us, God is equal to it. His matchless wisdom is never baffled. The situation may well be one which He Himself did not design—the creation,

not of His purpose, but of man's wilful misuse of his freedom. None the less on that account, the action for which it calls is plainly manifest to Him. So long as God lives no position will be hopeless. There can be no problem of human life, however complicated by human wrongdoing, of which He does not see the right solution.

Not only does God perceive this solution, but—and here is the second conviction—it is also His Will to reveal it. The God Whom Jesus made known, Who numbers the very hairs of our head and without Whose notice not a sparrow falls to the ground, does not dwell apart from the world that He has made. As the Incarnation has taught us once for all, He is to be found in the midst of the world's travail and agony, seeking to bring order out of chaos and moral life out of moral death. Such a God will not leave us to ourselves as we strive to act as His allies: He will be ceaselessly waiting to guide us.

At no time, therefore, need we be dependent solely upon our own wisdom: there is a higher Wisdom to which we have free and constant access. In whatever capacity we may be

called upon to act (whether as citizens or as members of a church or as private individuals), and by whatever circumstances our conduct may be conditioned (whether by those ordained of God Himself or by others originated through human folly), we can find ourselves in no position in which He is not willing to reveal the path He requires us to follow. The New Testament promise of guidance, far too prominent in its pages ever to be eradicated, implies that through our fellowship with God in Christ our own thought may be corrected and informed by the Divine thought.* In so far as this ideal is realised, in all the problems of the Kingdom we may count with simple confidence upon God's detailed and particular direction.

This daring assertion leads us naturally to the third of the convictions on which the deeper emphasis is being laid. Like all the spiritual gifts of God, the guidance thus claimed is spiritually conditioned. We must be ready to

* "In this connection I may refer to 1 Corinthians ii. 16, 'We have the mind of Christ,' which does not merely mean, we 'think' as Christ thinks, but 'Christ thinks in us'; the mental processes of the Christian are under the immediate inspiration of the spirit of Christ."—Johannes Weiss, "Paul and Jesus," p. 115. (E. T.)

receive as well as He to bestow. Indeed, the Divine gift will be proportionate to the human receptivity. It is only as our will is progressively surrendered to His perfect Will that the Divine direction can be made progressively clear to us.

On this third conviction it will be necessary for us to dwell a little more fully. In the quest for guidance the submission of our will to God must manifest itself at two important points.

In the first place, we need to be set free from all self-assertion in our thinking. Human self-assertion forms the chief hindrance to the revelation of God's Will. It is but too easy unwittingly and unintentionally to deaden our sensitiveness to His voice through prejudice and personal predilections. Not unnaturally almost every problem is approached with an individual bias of some kind. We are apt to hold tenaciously to particular views already formed, or to particular methods rendered familiar by custom, and in consequence the peril of a bondage to our preconceived ideas is never, perhaps, entirely absent. There is the risk, again, so long as we are human, that our thinking may be influenced by our individual

wishes. The knowledge that through our decision we ourselves or others may be affected in position or authority, or that some favourite plan may be promoted or frustrated, may readily impel our judgment in this direction or in that. All thinking into which such considerations are allowed to enter implies a merely partial consecration of the will. The love of our own preferences and desires—even in relation to the Kingdom of God—may prove an effective barrier between our souls and Him. Unless we are prepared, when we profess to seek God's guidance, to give up, should He ask it, our own strongest wishes and most deeply-rooted prejudices, we are imposing conditions upon God : we are setting Him limits within which to work ; we are saying, in effect, that we pray Him to lead us *provided that the leading shall be kept within the bounds of our own fixed opinions*. It is not in such an attitude of mind that men can receive the clear revelation of the Divine purpose. For the existence of personal bias, it is true, we may not be always or wholly responsible, but for readiness to lay it aside at the call of God, we most certainly are. The underlying assumption of all true prayer

38 *Fellowship in Thought and Prayer*

for God's direction is that it is God's thought of the position, *and His only*, that we seek. In every problem that arises, we can gain the knowledge of God's will only in so far as our own minds are laid freely at His disposal. In other words, the first condition of guidance is *that we are willing to be guided*.

In the second place, when God's will has once been made plain, we must be ready, with a strong and simple faith, to accept courageously whatever situation it involves. Our preconceived ideas and hopes are not the only means of setting limits to God's guidance; we may restrict Him just as surely by a nervous fear of consequences. The acts of God are often so drastic in their character that, from our cautious human standpoint, we find it hard to understand them. Sometimes before He builds up He breaks down. Sometimes He severs ere He unifies. He rejects a chosen nation. He divides a Church. He forsakes a long-established method. He abandons some time-honoured instrument of service. Even to His own people, at the hour of crisis, such far-reaching changes are apt to bring a blind and impotent perplexity. We confuse the

“accidents” with the “essence” of His working. Through long experience we have learnt so closely to associate the Divine activity with certain forms through which it has expressed itself and certain conditions by which it has usually been accompanied, that when these forms and these conditions are endangered, we begin to fear for the Divine activity itself. The result may be, and often is, that an unworthy and mistaken dread of what may happen prejudices our mind against particular suggestions, thus gravely circumscribing our susceptibility to the Divine guidance. The moral is not, of course, that we must be reckless of possible consequences, for there is a wise and altogether necessary attention that is due to them. It is the more sane and moderate lesson that we should not, through fear of them, make ourselves their slaves, since there is no less truly a respect for them that is both cowardly and altogether dangerous. Christian men and women can never safely neglect the faith that “ventures.” The great type of faith is one who went forth “not knowing whither he went.” Such a faith is the second essential condition of God’s guidance. Just as we must strive to free

our minds from every preconceived impression, so we must abandon all unworthy fear. An undue bias may be given to our thought by the one no less than by the other. There is a price to be paid for clear knowledge of God's will, and not seldom that price may be the readiness to sacrifice our trusted methods, our reliance on particular persons or the security promised by some familiar "safeguard." We must be willing, with simple faith, to take the one step that is plainly right, and go forth with God, even though it be into the darkness of the unknown.

We now see a part, at least, of what is meant by the statement that the Divine guidance is spiritually conditioned. All thinking which, by prejudice, self-interest, or fear, asserts the "self" over against the interests of the Kingdom, thereby and to that extent impairs God's power of leading us. For those men and women, therefore, who wish to receive the clearest revelation of God's mind, the removal of every such restriction becomes a simple necessity. This is the third fundamental conviction in the standpoint we are seeking to elucidate.

It is from the three convictions thus briefly reviewed that the attitude under consideration ultimately derives its origin. No one of the three, let us hasten to admit, implies any fresh discovery of truth. On the contrary, as we have suggested, each of them has always formed a part of the Church's traditional belief. What is new for the present generation is the greater clearness and assurance with which they are being apprehended. Truths like these, while seldom denied among Christians, tend from time to time to become ineffective through being relegated to the region of merely theoretical conceptions. The significant fact in the position we are interpreting is that, at least in certain circles, they have now been released from that region and are once again being widely and confidently accepted *as a basis for practical action*.

II

Granted, then, a God Who is competent to deal with every situation that may arise and willing to lead all who submit themselves to His direction, in what way may His guidance be

sought for and obtained? To this inquiry the men and women in question return a clear and quite definite reply.

At the general mode of approach we have already indirectly hinted. We have spoken of the emphasis laid upon "fellowship with God in Jesus Christ." It is through the communion of our spirit with God's Spirit, as such a phrase has implied, that we may be brought to a surer knowledge of His will. But this general method, which is of course the common heritage of all Christians, receives in the present instance a special and very suggestive application. The human fellowship with God on which reliance chiefly rests is *corporate* in character. There is no disparagement of the intercourse enjoyed by each separate soul with God, the necessity for which can never be transcended. But it is believed that that solitary contact with God does not exhaust the possibilities of our communion. No one of us lives unto himself. We are members one of another, and there is none who can say to his neighbour, "I have no need of thee." Hence in our common fellowship we may experience a mutual enrichment by means of which our whole capacity of vision and of

receptivity will be enlarged. "Where two or three are gathered" in the Name a special promise of the Presence is assured; and therefore a group of men and women praying or thinking together with unity of spirit and purpose may expect to receive a blessing which is more than the sum total of, and different in quality from, the blessing each would have received through the same amount of individual prayer or thought. This revived emphasis upon the reality of the Church's corporate life and upon its necessity to the complete experience of each member is full of significance, and no one should need to be reminded that it is simply a return to the New Testament point of view. Its practical outcome in the solving of the Kingdom's problems is that it yields us a clear and definite method in our search for God's guidance. We learn to look for His direction in a spiritual communion—a communion which is fellowship with one another as well as fellowship with Him; or, rather, since there are not two experiences but one, a communion which is fellowship with one another in Him.

We have called this a "clear and definite method." Since the impression derived from

a merely general statement may rather be that it is somewhat vague and impractical, it may be well to furnish a more detailed description of the manner in which it is employed. A company of men and women meet together that they may seek that richer consciousness of God, and, with it, that clearer light upon truth or conduct, their need of which has been impressed upon them. The first requirement is that their power of receptivity shall be intensified. Of God's willingness to lead them there is no question. The only point of uncertainty is in their ability to discern and to respond to His direction. Therefore they will begin with earnest and united prayer. This prayer will not be hurried ; it will be a sustained act of communion. And therein they will desire four things. First, they will together wait in silence for a more vivid sense of God's Presence and Reality. In the strain and bustle of ordinary life the vision of the unseen may easily grow dim ; they will tarry in stillness before God, craving the penitence and cleansing through which it may once more be made clear to them. Next, they will together pray for the coming of the Kingdom.

This will be no light and easy intercession ; they will reverently strive to view men from God's own standpoint, and, so far as may be, to enter into His sorrow for the world's sin and His sympathy with the world's need. And when they have thus learnt a little less imperfectly to see mankind as God sees it, alike in its transgressions and in its ultimate possibilities, they will at last be ready, in the third place, to ask for light on the particular matter in which they need the Divine illumination. They will therefore pray together that in this special situation God's own design may be made plain to them. Lastly, that all hindrance in themselves may be removed, they will seek, before they turn to examine the problem, to be freed from every form of self-assertion. In the consciously-realised presence of God, and relying on His aid, they will try to expel from their minds all previous bias, all personal preferences and all self-seeking motives, and at whatever cost, to will God's will both for themselves and for the world.

This prayer, it is important to observe, is offered in an atmosphere of fellowship. The group of men engaged is more than a mere

collection of individuals ; it is a body of believers—a small but essential section of that living organism which is the Church of Christ, Himself its living Head. On this account the entire spiritual efficiency alike of every part and of the whole is immeasurably increased. Because of its mystical union with its fellows and with the Head, each separate member acquires a power never possessed and never attainable in isolation. The prayer of each, his penitence, his consecration, his very experience of God's Presence, is deepened and enriched by those of all ; and, in its turn, " through that which every joint supplieth " the entire body is itself built up in love. This is no idle dream of what might be ; it is a statement of what actually takes place. And it is in this atmosphere of a fellowship both real and realised that those who employ the method we interpret are first made ready for the revelation of God's will.

From this act of united communion they will pass, in the same spirit of dependence, to their task of serious deliberation. The problem before them demands and must receive the most strenuous and enlightened thought that they

are capable of affording. There could be no greater error than to infer from the stress laid on communion that the method is crudely quietistic, depreciating intelligence and trusting to vague and irrational impulses. On the contrary, we have met with no assemblies of men by whom the duty of sincere and resolute thinking is more clearly apprehended. True, their ultimate reliance is upon a wisdom higher than their own. Christ's promise that His Spirit shall guide them into all the truth they believe to be, not merely a beautiful ideal, but also a practical fact on which they may safely count. None the less, beneath this confidence in a heavenly guidance there dwells no lurking hostility to human reason. The inference drawn is rather that, since God has made us rational beings, it is through our minds that He will most naturally lead us. Therefore, prepared by united communion, they turn in their search for God's will to a frank and determined discussion.

This brings us to another point at which, for the proper understanding of the method, the utmost clearness becomes necessary. From first to last in all their discussions these men and

women endeavour to think and talk *only in the spirit of their prayer*. They will use their brains, and use them, as we have said, at least as acutely as those who lay less practical stress upon prayer. But in all their thought their minds are made subject to a Higher Control. That is to say, while they will bring their keenest intelligence to bear upon the problem under consideration, they will do so not as men of self-assertion who cling tenaciously to views already formed, but as men who are honestly seeking God's *guidance* and therefore are prepared, even at the cost of strongly-rooted prejudices, to revise all earlier conclusions by any new light that He may reveal to them.

This light they are ready to receive from any quarter. Indeed, they are more than ready, they are anxious, to do so. For they realise that in thought, as in all else, we are members one of another. Here once again the fundamental fact of corporate life emerges into prominence. No one man's mind, however cultivated and sincere, can perceive the whole truth, whether in relation to conduct or in relation to thought. As the physical light,

falling on various objects, is reflected in various shades of colour, each but a partial presentation of its great original, so the light of truth, reflected from men's different minds, is found to exhibit many different aspects, in no single one of which can truth's perfect image be discerned. In the second case, as in the first, the pure white light is gained *only when all these partial reflections are combined*. Each individual's view needs to be checked and supplemented by the view of his fellows. It is not merely that no separate human being ever has attained a perfect wisdom ; as a separate human being he never *can* attain it. He has been so made that he will find his fullest life only in fellowship with others—a fact which applies to his intellectual life as well as to life in all its other phases. As, then, he seeks to form right judgments, he has no power, even if he had the will, to be strictly independent. He was born a member of a body, and not even in his thinking has he the right to say to another, " I have no need of thee."

That being the case, men who are seeking God's guidance in any given situation, and believe that their minds are the instruments

through which He is wont to direct them, will be eager to welcome light from every possible angle. It will be assumed that no single point of view contains the whole truth which God is waiting to reveal ; and this will be acknowledged even by those among whom that point of view may be most strongly maintained. But it will also be assumed that every point of view adopted by an honest thinker will probably embody some aspect of the truth—an aspect which, however partial or exaggerated, yet cannot safely be neglected in the final synthesis ; and this fact will be freely recognised even by those who regard that standpoint with the utmost initial prejudice. In other words, the path to truth, whether in thought or in action, lies along the line of accepting light from every quarter—even from that with which at first we have the least degree of sympathy—and in focussing these scattered rays into as real a unity as we are then able to attain.

Two features of this method call, even at the risk of repetition, for a slightly extended emphasis. (a) Since an open mind, which is only another name for willingness to be taught, is one of its essential conditions, to ignore the

view of those whose ideas are opposed to one's own ; to regard it with suspicion ; to treat it with sarcasm or ridicule ; to overcome it merely by some clever ruse ; most of all, to deny, in the Name of Christ, the fundamental Christian spirit by making the difference a ground for angry and unmannerly quarrels—to do any or all of these things is as unsafe as it is pagan. However little we realise the fact, it may in reality be to close our eyes to one of the sources from which some ray of God's own light was meant to come to us, and so to limit His power of leading us into the full knowledge of His will. Therefore, every man is not only allowed but expected to say exactly what he thinks, without the slightest fear of misunderstanding or offence. It is a basal assumption that truth is stronger than error and even than partial truth, and that undue sensitiveness at hearing one's own views criticised or contradicted is a latent form of self-assertion, unworthy of a Christian. (b) Though every man's conviction is thus entitled to respect, it is accepted only in so far as, after due consideration, it appears to be the medium of Divine direction. To assign an added weight to a man's opinion

in virtue of his wealth, on the ground of his status, social or official, or because, forgetful of the Christian mind, he manifests a dogmatic and imperious temper, is nothing less than a betrayal of truth. Any who expected to command so adventitious an importance would be placing human considerations before the interests of the Kingdom : any who yielded to it would be guilty of collusion in the sin. This error, like the wish to silence judgments contrary to our own, proves a most serious obstacle in the way of God's guidance. It involves, in fact, a denial of the very spirit and temper by which that guidance is conditioned.

In conversation conducted on such principles as these the clear and definite guidance of God may be confidently expected. Baldly stated in black and white, this truth may seem somewhat vague and unconvincing : experienced in actual practice, its impressiveness is at times almost startling, and some of its definite results have been remarkable. For when self-assertion has once been forsaken, and through its removal men's minds are at last made truly receptive, a very real and precious fellowship in thought is rendered possible. Mind acts freely on mind,

each in its turn exploring, checking, challenging the other. The thought of each is quickened and stimulated. It rises to possibilities as yet unrealised in its moments of solitary activity. Exaggerations are corrected, deficiencies supplied, the sense of proportion duly adjusted. And in the process many earlier differences of view are found to disappear. A perceptible *rapprochement* is effected, and in the end a measure of agreement reached which at the outset would have appeared in the highest degree improbable. It is in this way that, as each individual thinker approaches nearer to a common centre, the wonderful phenomenon of *corporate thought* is experienced.

It must not be supposed, of course, that this result is always, or even generally, achieved with ease. The process is one which calls for determined thinking and untiring patience. To seem to suggest that, even in such an atmosphere, difficulties conveniently vanish of themselves would be entirely misleading and untrue. Initial differences of judgment are not to be reconciled by hastily-considered suggestions or within a previously determined time-limit: they yield only to the disinterested search which

is prepared to spare neither time nor effort in seeking for the truth. In such a search, indeed, the first stage will often seem to accentuate rather than to reduce the difficulties. For since, in the final synthesis, due weight is to be assigned to the truth underlying every standpoint that can fairly be defended, the earliest step of all must be to bring each difficulty out into the open light, to consider it frankly without bias, and to endeavour to appreciate its degree of strength no less than the points at which it is capable of adjustment. Discussion of the differences of judgment thus thrown into clear relief will naturally issue in more than one kind of result. Sometimes the differences will be resolved more quickly ; at other times with greater effort. Sometimes the agreement reached will be complete ; at other times it will be only partial. In each alternative, however, the progress from diversity towards unity will normally be found to be so marked and so impressive that no mere power of human persuasion will any longer appear sufficient to account for it. In the view of those by whom it has actually been experienced, there is only one explanation which will satisfy the facts. In

response to their united prayer and faith they have received a very real and definite guidance of God.

III

So great a claim can scarcely be left expressed in terms so general. It demands that we should face the last and most difficult question raised by our inquiry. With what degree of certainty may the Divine guidance be expected by those who seek for it in corporate thought and prayer?

This question is of vital importance to our whole discussion, and no reply can be considered satisfactory which is not based upon clear and careful discrimination.

The first requirement is that we should recognise frankly those limitations of our own receptivity which are inseparable from our present conditions of life. God's power to guide us, for example, must surely be restricted by our imperfections of mind and of character. It must further depend upon the thoroughness of our own thinking, since, in a world of order, all slackness of mental effort and every refusal to pierce below the surface of things to the

deeper issues that are involved will inevitably bear its just and proper penalty of loss. Moreover, if our view of fellowship has been correct and the complete vision of truth is framed from "that which every" part "supplieth," there is a sense in which the perfect vision can never be possible to a limited group of men and women: it must wait until every member of the body concerned has brought his contribution to it. To this extent, then, so long as the circle of seekers is composed of fallible men and women and remains still limited in its range, even the Divine guidance, though the clearest possible in the circumstances, may be relative rather than absolute.

There is a second point at which discrimination becomes necessary. It is important for our immediate purpose to distinguish between two different types of problem in which the Divine guidance may be desired. We may seek for enlightenment either on some problem of truth or on some problem of conduct. The two cases must be considered separately.

In the former case the results achieved will probably always be less final and decisive. The questions involved are usually so profound

in character, and demand for their elucidation so high a degree of mental ability and (often) so specialised an educational training, that, in the natural order of God's working, no ordinary group of men and women would expect to be made the recipients of a new and ultimate revelation concerning them. What they may look for—and this in proportion to their intellectual efficiency and to the honesty and purposefulness of their thought—is a progressive power to understand the revelation already given, and to re-interpret it to meet the special needs of their own generation.

Even this limited progress will, as a rule, be only gradually achieved. Where problems of abstract truth are concerned, complete agreement is very difficult to attain. As we have seen, the very richness and amplitude of God's truth produce differences in men's minds—differences indeed which, until a higher synthesis has been reached, it is necessary in the interest of truth itself candidly to maintain. Doubtless, since truth is one, all these differences are capable of being resolved into a final unity, but the finite nature of our minds necessarily renders the process a very slow one.

When, therefore, a group is concentrating upon a problem of this character, the immediate result, even on the method we have been expounding, may well be only partial agreement. This fact should afford no ground for discouragement. It does not prove that corporate prayer and thought are ineffective, for in these particular problems the method sets no time-limit for the Divine guidance. It should rather be construed either as a hint that the problem in question is not yet ripe for solution, or as a call to further and more strenuous thinking. Some consideration by which opposing views would be reconciled may have been overlooked, or the presuppositions on which the conversation has been conducted may be false and in need of closer scrutiny. In any of those events, it is important to notice, the temporary check will itself mark one stage in the process of the Divine leading.

Not even when the discussion ends in unanimity of judgment would it be safe, in this type of inquiry, to interpret the result forthwith as a sign of Divine direction. A group of men and women may be unanimous in error as well as in truth, and this might well be the case on

the method before us if the assumptions with which they started were mistaken or the motive which inspired them were misdirected. Such a possibility must obviously be allowed for, and the unanimous judgment be accepted not as final but as tentative and designed for subsequent re-examination. In particular, it is necessary to relate it to former revelations of truth. The authority of tradition, we admit, is by no means unlimited. But God has spoken to men in earlier generations as well as in our own, and all that we know of Him suggests that His word of to-day cannot deny His word of yesterday. There may be—we believe there will be—constant development in His revelation ; but, without exception, it will be *orderly* development. Before, therefore, we can assume that ideas on which we are led even into corporate agreement form part of the Divine truth, they must be tested by their power to assimilate themselves with the indubitable revelation of the past. There is perhaps no point at which the smaller group of seekers is less independent of the wider fellowship than in the search for abstract truth.

Considerations like these will help us to

determine the limits within which we may speak of the certainty of God's guidance, when the method under review is applied to problems of thought. No claim is put forward that any small gathering of Christians, adopting the corporate method of inquiry, is thereupon free to expect either that it will be led by a series of quick stages into the fulness of Divine truth, or even that truth shall be necessarily ascribed to particular conclusions on which it may have reached ultimate agreement. All history shows, on the contrary, that God's revelation of truth is a gradual process, the very slowness of which forms part of man's educative discipline ; and that the advancement of this process demands, on the human side, the careful correlation of newer ideas with the conceptions of earlier thinkers. By those who seek for truth in fellowship, no less than by those who work in isolation, these primary conditions of their task must be accepted without reserve. In other words, in this first application of the method the certainty that we are being guided by God will belong to our search for truth considered as a whole rather than to any particular result achieved on any particular occasion.

Of that larger guidance, however, we may be absolutely assured. The claim we advance for the corporate method is, not that it abolishes the conditions which govern all other modes of investigation, but that it enables them to be satisfied with greater ease and completeness. In a group where true fellowship is enjoyed, the powers of the whole are larger than those of any of its parts. So stimulated and enriched are the minds of those who compose it that their united perception of truth acquires a sensitiveness and a sureness impossible to each of them in isolation. And this greater capacity to respond to truth involves a greater certainty of guidance. Granted the earnest purpose, the disinterested motive and the teachable spirit, even the individual seeker, if the promises of Jesus hold good, may count with confidence on the Divine direction. But when, by the potent influence of fellowship, each of these qualities has been raised to a higher degree of efficiency, that confidence will be built upon a firmer foundation than ever.

We pass from inquiries as to problems of truth to those directed to problems of conduct.

At this point also it will be wise to draw somewhat careful distinctions.

The problem in question will sometimes be concerned with general principles of conduct. The issue raised, for example, may be that of the right Christian attitude to the employment of force, to the acquisition and use of money, to social and political reformation, or to one of a hundred similar topics. In such cases what we have been saying will again be largely applicable. For where only abstract ideas of conduct are involved the line of division we have hitherto drawn is not altogether valid. Questions like these, although ultimately concerned with action, are at the same time problems of truth, differing from the problems already considered only as relating to ethical rather than to theological or to philosophical truth. It follows that the conditions governing the one type of inquiry will be largely operative in the other also. An important difference, however, is deserving of notice. In the case of many ethical problems the mental ability and training necessary to clear vision is at once more common and easier of attainment than in the case of problems of pure thought. In con-

sequence, the progress towards truth may be expected to be more speedy and by more definitely assured stages.

At other times the question of conduct will be raised, not with respect to general principles, but in the form of some concrete instance in which a more or less immediate decision is required. For example, a committee may have to select an important official, or a church or a society be called upon to choose between two or more rival policies of action. In these and similar cases the unspecified time-limit for guidance, available for the inquiries considered above, no longer remains permissible. A definite situation is presented, and within a fixed period, greater or less according to circumstances, a definite line of action must be accepted. Under such conditions those who seek for the Divine enlightenment by corporate prayer and thought may rightly look for a more immediate and decisive guidance. That in cases like these, men and women, resolutely striving to learn God's Will for them in the spirit and with the earnestness which this method inculcates, should yet be left by Him without direction is,

on the principles of Jesus, simply unthinkable. At this point, then, we venture to speak with uncompromising assurance. In dealing with problems of truth we have recognised frankly the gradual nature of God's revelation and, with equal frankness, the consequent limitations by which His guidance may be conditioned. But in the type of problem now before us those particular limitations appear to be less effectual. For, while the revelation of abstract truth is addressed primarily to man's intellectual faculties, which he cannot altogether command, the disclosure of a concrete duty is addressed primarily to his will, the control of which lies largely within his own power. Moreover, in these cases, as we have said, the situation is urgent. Specific action is called for. The Divine guidance, if it is to be given at all, must be given within a recognised period; and, having promised it to those who "seek first the Kingdom," God cannot deny His promise. The one serious limitation possible at this point would arise from the seekers' own failure to satisfy the conditions of guidance. Only let them be faithful to those, and the Divine direction must be a certainty.

How, then, in such cases as these, may this Divine direction be identified? Let us return to the actual method of inquiry. The group of seekers have prayed together and talked together in the spirit we have endeavoured to describe. To what sort of conclusion will their discussion lead them? Here, as in the search for abstract truth, there is more than one possibility.

When everyone present is seeking the knowledge of God's will rather than a confirmation of his own preconceptions, the most pronounced differences of view will often disappear. Men and women who at first were far apart will in the end be found of one mind and judgment, and that, not infrequently, one which at the outset none of their number had either reached or even conceived. In all such instances the resultant unanimity may be interpreted—and, as consequent developments have repeatedly proved, may rightly be interpreted—as affording the manifest guidance of God Himself.

At other times this perfect concord will not be attained. Difficulties will be reduced, but not wholly banished. Despite the most sympathetic consideration of one another's views

the convictions of different individuals may still remain opposed. In that case a remedy for the apparent deadlock should be sought in silent corporate prayer, experience proving that, after a brief interval spent in such fellowship, difficulties which before had seemed insuperable have again and again been known to fade away. When circumstances permit, the final decision might, if necessary, be postponed to a subsequent occasion. Many of us are backward pupils in God's school and require to give plenty of time to our task of discerning His way. An agreement which has long appeared impossible will often be reached in the end through unstinted patience and renewed endeavour. Should that happy result, whether sooner or later, ensue, this ultimate unanimity, like that which was reached more immediately, will definitely indicate the Divine direction.

The possibility remains that the difficulties may none the less persist, and every effort towards complete agreement be frustrated. Even then faith in God's leading should abide unshaken. To imagine that He would withhold His guidance from those who seek it with strenuous prayer and self-renouncing

devotion would be, as we have said, to abandon as impracticable some of the most solemn assurances of Jesus. When, therefore, full unanimity proves as yet impossible, we must assume that God's guidance is no less real and clear than in the more welcome issue. And that guidance, in circumstances like these, is to be identified with the degree of unanimity that *has* been attained. So far as all, equally desirous of understanding His will, have been led together to a single judgment, thus far, they may confidently believe, it is His will that they should proceed.

Beyond that point we have no right to dogmatise. The continued existence of a convinced minority, after a search for God's will so thorough and so disinterested, may possibly denote that all steps beyond those on which agreement has been reached are not, or at least are not yet, demanded by Him. Among those who practise the fellowship method of inquiry there are some who incline to this opinion, and particular cases can doubtless be cited in which experience has shown it to be correct. To give the principle a general application, however, would be to assume a knowledge which we

cannot command. It is always possible that the limited group of seekers may have lacked, or may have under-emphasised, some point of view by means of which unanimity might, after all, have been attained. There is the further possibility that, unconsciously and in spite of their good-will, certain of their number may have allowed their prejudices to influence their judgment. Only if a group were to consist of ideal men and women, accomplishing their task with perfect efficiency, could this negative principle of guidance be applied with any degree of confidence. At this point, therefore, all dogmatism would be unwise.

It is with the *positive* principles of guidance that this volume is more immediately concerned. And here it is intended to be quite definite in its teaching. With regard to the question raised in the preceding paragraph there is abundant ground for hesitation, but on the main, positive issue before us our claim may well be more confident and more explicit. So far as the problem involved is that of guidance for action, our aim has been to advance three specific propositions which, after so lengthy a discussion, it may be useful briefly to recapitulate:

1. That, on the lines laid down, a group of people will often be carried from initial differences of judgment to a unanimity which would otherwise be unattainable ;

2. that the common judgment thus reached will often be so different from, and so plainly an advance upon, the judgment with which any of them began, as to suggest that the entire group has been definitely guided by a Higher Will than its own ; and

3. that, *when this is the case, the unanimous judgment attained, whether it cover the whole or only a part of the problem under consideration, may be accepted with absolute confidence as a revelation from God Himself.*

So uncompromising an assertion of the Divine guidance and so close a definition of the means by which it can be recognised, may, in the judgment of some readers, appear to be bold to the point of rashness. Nevertheless, with respect to the type of problem to which they have been confined, they are held and stated with deliberate conviction. To call attention to them, indeed, is one of the main designs with which the present volume has been written. They are

not the outcome of idle theorising: as the succeeding chapter will show, they are the fruit of widespread and repeated experience. And, tested in actual practice, they have been so signally justified by their results that, in the view of an increasing number of sagacious men and women, they contain the promise of an altogether new hope, alike for the Church of Christ and for the world to which she ministers.

Here, then, is a definite and practical method of seeking to learn the will of God. Its basal assumption is that of Scripture—the abiding reality of the Divine guidance. It does not, however, in any final sense, oppose the Divine guidance to human reason. It teaches, rather, that, instead of being alternative means of direction between which we have to choose, these two are complementary the one to the other. We have not to trust *either* Divine guidance *or* human reason: our reliance should be upon Divine guidance revealed *through* human reason; but through human reason disciplined for this very purpose in two ways—firstly, by communion with God, and secondly, by fellowship in thought and prayer with other men.

It is this emphasis upon fellowship—with our fellow-men as well as with God—that forms the distinctive mark of the method we have been studying. This emphasis does not ignore the place of the individual in the world's moral and religious development. Most of our progress in the past has been inspired by great leaders of thought and action, and the need for them will probably never be outgrown. But—apart from the fact that even they are largely the product and mouthpiece of the common tendencies of their age—the personalities of great leaders are not the only medium through which Divine illumination may come to us. In the fellowship of ordinary men and women, consecrated by their devotion to Christ and to one another, there lies a power which neither the world nor the Church of the present day has learnt adequately to appreciate.

To the value and reality of this power it has been our aim to invite attention, and with this end in view we have expounded one method by which it may be applied. Needless to say, this method is not the only one available: in the great search for truth and duty the principles of fellowship may be explored along many other

detailed lines than those traced out in the present chapter. Nor, again, is the method possessed of any quasi-magical virtue, as though it could yield men direction in return for its merely mechanical application: its efficacy resides exclusively in the spiritual aim and attitude by which it is conditioned. The claim we have sought to make for it is, neither that it stands alone as a medium for guidance nor that it has acquired any arbitrary or artificial value, but that, applied with strict fidelity to its underlying principles, it has been proved by experience to be a real and powerful instrument of progress. Its employment even on a limited scale has already produced definite and remarkable results: its latent possibilities we believe to be incalculable. The Church in this generation has yet to learn the secret of fellowship. The consequences of such an enlightenment no prophet could foretell. It may be that for the Church to master that secret would be to solve her most inveterate problems and to find the key to the triumph of the Kingdom.

Chapter Three: The Test of Experience

IN the previous chapter certain specific claims have been advanced for the practice of fellowship in thought and prayer : it is well that at this point they should be substantiated by means of concrete examples. Our acceptance of alleged truth is made, and rightly made, dependent upon its ability to satisfy the test of experience. It therefore becomes necessary for us to show that the method described yields definite and appreciable results in the life of those by whom it has been undertaken.

The writer's earliest enlightenment as to its power was gained in association with the British Student Christian Movement, through the kindness of whose leaders he was allowed to take part in the preparations for one of the Movement's great quadrennial Conferences. This kindness has been further increased by the permission, now granted to him, to give a brief account of the various steps by which that Conference was preceded. The method under review could scarcely receive a better illustration.

The Conference in question was to be composed of considerably more than a thousand students—representatives of universities and colleges from almost every part of Europe ; and its essential aim was to impress more deeply upon the student world the imperative claim of the Foreign Missionary enterprise. It was plainly a strategic opportunity and one which called for the wisest and most careful preparation. The preparation began two and a half years beforehand. In the earliest stages of the process the leaders of the Movement used from time to time to meet together in search of the answer to a single question: What is it God's will to say concerning His Kingdom to the student world in the present generation? The question itself is worthy of a moment's scrutiny. The inquiry was not, What are the views for which we leaders should like to secure attention? Nor was it, What distinguished speakers can we bring together in order to announce an impressive "platform"? Both questions would have assumed that the key to the situation was to be found in human wisdom and eloquence. These men and women were convinced, on the contrary, that if the Conference was actually to inspire truer thought and

action in relation to the Kingdom, nothing less than the Divine guidance would suffice. And that guidance they, as Christians, believed to be accessible to them. The Spirit had been given to guide men into truth : those, therefore, who, setting aside self-will, sought in humility to learn only the will of God, might be sure that they would not be left without direction. Accordingly, they met, as we have said, to wait together upon God until His mind was made known to them.

The method employed was that of corporate prayer and thought. As our earlier study will have prepared us to expect, there was no disparagement of the human mind as the instrument of the Divine guidance. Sound judgment, practised insight into the student-attitude to life, and considerable expert knowledge of the problems and opportunities of the mission field—all were brought under contribution. And yet the confidence of this little group was reposed on none of these things. While the ideas thus furnished were thrown into the common stock, the minds that were informed by them looked for, and were made subject to, a Higher Guidance. And the Higher Guidance was actually experienced. Little by

little, the general outlines of a message began to emerge. The leaders were conscious, as they prayed and talked together, of a progressive unity in their thinking, until, having started with acknowledged differences of opinion, they found themselves in the end to be of one mind as to the main aspects of truth which at that period most of all demanded emphasis.

The next question requiring attention was that of the speakers who should be invited to expound the message to the Conference. At this point again the method of preparation is highly instructive. If the belief was justified that, at the present stage in the history of the Kingdom, God had His own message for the student world, there must be somewhere those whom He Himself had been qualifying to deliver it—men and women on whose minds His Spirit had already been impressing the particular aspects of truth of which that message was to be composed. The next step, therefore, was to be led into touch with these. In the high purpose to which the leaders of the Movement were committed, the well-known speaker, as the well-known speaker, counted for nothing : it was God's prepared messengers, whether prominent

or obscure, of whom they stood in need. And who should lead them to these messengers but God Himself? Once more, then, they resorted to that method of guidance which experience has again and again proved to be so effective; and, as they talked together in the spirit and atmosphere of prayer, they were gradually led, as before, into a unity of judgment which they interpreted as the Divine direction.

About a year before the Conference itself was due, and again a few months later, the speakers thus selected were invited, with several other trusted friends of the Movement, to meet the leaders in a brief Retreat, each Retreat lasting about three days. It was at this point that the present writer was able to join in their fellowship. These two Retreats mark yet another stage in the careful preparations that were made. The need for them will easily be recognised. The speakers chosen represented a striking diversity of ecclesiastical standpoint. The specific subjects entrusted to them, moreover, though essentially interrelated, were of necessity concerned with many different regions of experience. No one could fail to see the danger that, when the Conference assembled, it might

furnish merely a series of disconnected addresses rather than, through many parts, one real and living message. If such a peril were to be averted, those who were called to be leaders or speakers must realise beforehand, in close mental and spiritual communion, their own essential oneness in Christ and the ultimate unity of the truths to be interpreted. Accordingly, these days of retirement were set apart that, without haste or distraction, we might have fellowship one with another in Him. And the purpose placed before us was achieved. For, as we prayed and talked in the atmosphere of those Retreats, not only were we ourselves drawn closer to one another in spirit and outlook, but the general outline of the message was gradually filled in for us, and out of many initial differences the various truths which, it was believed, the Conference was intended to impress were welded together into a living unity.

In the approach to this important Conference, therefore, reliance was placed upon fellowship in thought and prayer, first for determining the general outlines of the message ; secondly, for selecting the speakers who should be invited to interpret it ; and, thirdly, for minimising the

risks of divergent standpoints and securing that, though many different subjects were to be considered, they should yet combine to produce a single, unified impression.

Now, what was the result of this deliberately accepted method of preparation? Few who attended the successive sessions of the Conference would hesitate as to the reply. In the first place, to those who were looking for the coming of the Kingdom the Conference brought *a clear and definite message*. It was far more than a series of interesting and inspiring meetings: it yielded a new vision which, faithfully obeyed, would remain as a life-long possession. In particular, there emerged the suggestive view that the problem of Foreign Missions abroad and the problem of our social and industrial conditions at home are interrelated with an intimacy of which few of us had previously possessed any apprehension. It would probably not be too much to say that, through the men and women present at the Conference and through the influence gained by the volume of published addresses, this conception has now received a degree of attention never before assigned to it, so that, to this extent, a permanent

contribution has been made to our missionary thought. The further truth that the existence of both the problems concerned is ultimately to be traced to a subtle selfishness for the perpetuation of which not even Christian people are free from grave responsibility, if a view already to some extent recognised, was interpreted with a freshness and impressiveness which made it appear almost a new conception. Along with this illumination for the mind, we were conscious throughout of a subdued but most potent appeal to the heart and conscience. The vision was one which demanded translation into obedience. In those hours of solemn, earnest thought to nearly two thousand men and women, the finest fruit of the universities of Europe, there came the voice of God, summoning them afresh to consecration and to personal service ; and it is a matter of simple knowledge that many of their number heard at that Conference the definite call to their life's work.

In the second place, this clear message of the Conference proved, as we had hoped, a *unified* message. We have seen that, humanly speaking, such a result was far from being a foregone conclusion. On the contrary, the final im-

pression carried away by the delegates might well have been one of many voices, not merely differing but even discordant. Despite, however, the very varied fields of thought brought under review and the selection of speakers ranging in their ecclesiastical convictions from the Friend to the High Churchman, the manifold and diverse elements of teaching presented were fused into a remarkable unity. The resultant effect was that not of separate chords, but of one harmonious theme. Strangely yet indubitably the many voices were lost in a Voice.

In brief,—and let due weight be given to each word in this bold but deliberate statement—men and women realised that in those memorable sessions they had been brought face to face with *God*, and had received from Him a definite message and a definite call—a message and a call which would remain with them long after the Conference itself had become an episode of the past. At the present time there are workers all over the world who look back with gratitude to “Liverpool, 1912” as one of the few outstanding epochs of their spiritual experience.

One detail, which happened to be brought to the writer’s personal knowledge, is too signifi-

cant to pass unrecorded. Among the speakers was a man who had hitherto been a stranger to the Student Movement. For several years a certain aspect of truth had been impressing itself upon his mind with inexorable insistence. The more carefully he considered it the stronger became his conviction that, in the present age, its proclamation formed a vital part of the Church's message. At the same time, the truth in question had never secured for itself an adequate recognition in the general Christian teaching, and he had long been waiting for an audience sufficiently representative in character to ensure for his view the opportunity of more widespread attention. An unexpected invitation to speak at this Student Movement Conference gave him the ideal platform for his purpose, enabling him to reach the ear of many destined to play an influential part in guiding the thought of the next generation. Some time later, in a letter which the writer has been allowed to see, the Chairman of that Conference stated that this was the very line of thought which some of them had for years been waiting to have placed before students. The incident needs no elaboration. On the one hand, we

have these leaders of student life feeling the need of a certain emphasis in the Movement's teaching : on the other hand, we have a man on whose mind, quite unknown to them, God had been impressing the very truth which they had desired to make clear. Instead of inviting some prominent speaker for the sake of his name, they waited in united thought and prayer for the Divine guidance. And God led them to a man, a stranger to themselves, whom He Himself had long been preparing for this very service. Can this be due to accident, or does it not rather suggest that in actual practice the method is one that *works* ?

It has seemed well, for the sake of clearness, to present one example of the method under consideration with some degree of fulness. The reader, however, is asked to remember that this is only a single illustration out of many which might have been selected. Numerous other instances could be drawn from the history of the Student Movement alone. Indeed, if we had space to offer adequate testimony to the method's effectiveness, that great association itself would constitute one of the most impressive

proofs to be adduced. The Student Movement is probably the most wonderful development of modern Christianity. In the judgment of tens of thousands who have had contact with it, it stands in the religious world of to-day unrivalled for the clearness of its spiritual vision and the richness of its spiritual power. And how has this young community, of small and modest origin, advanced to its present position of leadership among the Churches? It is by means of the method which this volume is expounding. In conversation with the writer the secretary of the Movement in Great Britain once asserted this explanation of its growth with unmistakable emphasis. Reviewing, he said, a period of some twenty years, he could clearly distinguish certain outstanding crises in the Movement's history. On each occasion the leaders had been confronted by a situation in which, while important action of some kind had become necessary, they themselves were baffled as to the right decision. On each occasion, in their own uncertainty, they had set apart a period for quiet retirement, that through corporate prayer and thought they might seek to learn the will of God. And in every

instance, as they had prayed and thought together, their perplexity had been dissipated, one difficulty after another had gradually disappeared, and in the end some course of action had been discerned as to the wisdom of which they had now become united in their judgment. At the time itself they had often been unable to grasp the full significance of the resolve taken. But to-day, looking back and seeing events in their true perspective, they could perceive that the occasions concerned had been the critical turning-points in the history of the Movement. It was precisely at these moments that they had entered upon some new mode of activity which could be recognised, in retrospect, as essential to the Movement's providential course, so that, had they arrived at any other judgment than that actually adopted, one of their most fruitful spheres of influence would now have been wanting to them. To sum up their long experience in a sentence, the times at which the Guiding Hand of God has been most manifestly present in their history have always been those at which they have resorted to this particular method of inquiry. They have thus been convinced by repeated experiment that in the

fellowship of thought and prayer the definite will of God Himself has in very truth been disclosed to them.

To other groups of men and women the same kind of experience has been granted. Is it a mere coincidence, for example, that it was by this method of preparation that the Edinburgh Missionary Conference was preceded? That Conference forms the most notable Council of modern Church history. To hundreds of earnest Christians it proved nothing less than a new revelation. In spiritual power and wisdom it transcended anything that they had previously known. Indeed, they seemed to themselves, during its sessions, to have come into touch, for the first time, with something like Apostolic Christianity. Many of us have no doubt as to the explanation of this : they were experiencing the fruit of that clear guidance and rich inspiration which God had been pleased to grant to those who had sought Him in corporate thought and prayer.

At the present time various other groups of Christians are meeting in reliance upon this mode of approach to God. The Free Church Fellowship, which came into being in 1911, has

attracted to its membership large numbers of the abler and more ardent young ministers and laymen in English Nonconformity. The influence of its annual Conference has already transformed the spirit and labours of men and women all over the country, and, with the promise of great usefulness, it is employing the "corporate" method to conduct a careful investigation into the present-day message and mission of Christianity. The inner story of the growth of this Fellowship, of the difficulties surmounted, and of the manifest direction granted by God in moments of grave perplexity, would constitute a remarkable document, were it ever published for the world to read. One crisis in particular, in which, after an honest division of opinion so serious and protracted as even to threaten the continued unity of the group, patient loyalty to the chosen method of inquiry finally issued in happy agreement, forms an episode which no one concerned in it is ever likely to forget. More recently an Anglican Fellowship, created on the same basis, has come into existence, and there are separate Fellowships of a similar type in the Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist and Methodist Churches,

as well as among the Society of Friends. There is not one of their number which has not proved a centre of new spiritual life and vision among its members. Higher ideals of service, a deeper and more intelligent devotion, a stronger self-discipline and a more conscientious unselfishness—these are the gifts which the new Fellowship-life has communicated. God in Christ has been found a greater Reality ; His perfect will for the world has become at once more welcome and more imperative ; fellow-feeling with the entire human family has been intensified ; in a word, the whole spiritual life has been re-vivified. And it is especially noteworthy that some who have approached the Fellowship's method with hesitation and even with suspicion have been transformed by actual contact with it into its most zealous exponents and defenders.

Nor is our brief survey yet complete. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same fundamental method appears to underlie the work of the Laymen's Missionary Movement, of the Christian Crusade and of the Interdenominational Conference of Social Service Unions. In these, as in each of the method's applications, we recognise a necessary adaptation to the genius of a par-

ticular organisation: but alike in their great central gatherings and in their smaller local conferences these movements present the same essential features as those we have been attempting to delineate—the deliberate retirement for a sustained period of communion, the determined act of submission to the will of God, and the resolute search for the Divine guidance through the medium of corporate prayer and thought. The inspiration received and diffused by means of these movements is too well known to demand description. But one general characteristic—shared by them in common with all the other groups of which we have been writing—is especially deserving of emphasis: the majority of those who value them most highly are men whose time is exceptionally occupied. From such a fact the method of fellowship in thought and prayer receives a tribute of a singularly convincing character. So real and so precious is the inspiration which it mediates that, year by year, several consecutive days are eagerly devoted to its practice by many of the busiest men in Christendom.

This refreshment of spiritual life, therefore, is being experienced in many different direc-

tions. Indeed, so uniformly does it seem to follow upon the sincere acceptance of the principles under consideration that it begins to present the appearance of a new movement of the Divine Spirit, breaking through into almost all the Churches. As yet, the cloud is "as small as a man's hand," but, in the view of those who have perceived it, it is rich in its promise of the world's renewal. And the hope inspired becomes yet stronger when we remember that this emphasis upon faith in God's specific guidance, upon thought and prayer as the natural medium for its communication, and upon the fact of fellowship as one of the deepest realities of human experience, instead of being a modern innovation, merely marks a return to some of the fundamental conceptions of New Testament Christianity.

Chapter Four: Fellowship in Action

IF our argument is valid, on the one hand, that a relatively untapped source of immense power lies in fellowship in thought and in prayer ; and, on the other hand, that the world is in peril of chaos for lack of this very gift, it must follow that the immediate and sustained practice of fellowship is vital at once to the life of the Church and to the saving of the world. It is not that the Church has the choice whether she will go on living without fellowship or with it. There is no such alternative. If she has fellowship she will have life—abundantly. But if she fails in fellowship she will die. And with her would surely die the world's last great hope of a life of enduring and ordered freedom for all races of men.

We hold the lively hope of the Kingdom of God. We believe in the Church as His organ for bringing into being that new humanity which is the Kingdom on earth. Yet, we see the Church divided and faltering at its task, failing at once in vision and in action, largely through the defects of its experience and prac-

tice of fellowship in Christ ; and the world in peril through lack of her leadership. The challenge is absolute and ultimate.

What, then, are we—here and now—to do ?

We are called, first, to build up a new life of fellowship in the Church for the world. The Christian Society, as we have seen, is ideally a spiritual fellowship dominated by the idea of the Kingdom of God. It is a brotherhood so intimately united with Christ that it is His body ; its members are His members. It is so filled and fused with the Holy Spirit that its separate elements are fitly framed together in His living temple. It has the mind of Christ so fully and in such unity that His will is its will and it thinks His thought. And as His thought and will are for the redemption of men everywhere, that aim—the coming of His Kingdom—dominates its life.

Holding this ideal of the life of the Church before us steadily, with its outline clearly focussed, we discover at least four lines along which the practice of fellowship in the Church can be adventured ; each avenue of exploration being vitally linked with all the others. There is, first, the life of that congregation of Christian

folk with whom we worship under one roof ; there is, secondly, fellowship in co-operation with the other local groups or congregations—the Christians of other denominations in the place where we live ; there is, thirdly, the whole life of the denomination to which our own little local congregation belongs ; and there is, fourthly, the fellowship on the larger scale of “ the Holy Church throughout all the world.”

I

For almost all of us the first and often the most difficult ground of our practice of fellowship is in the place where we live and with the people with whom we meet for worship. Yet a lack of quick, vital fellowship in the local congregation invalidates all effort everywhere. It is often easier to love in the abstract the brother whom we have not seen than to hold concrete continuous fellowship with the brother with whom we travel to the City every day.

Here it is not so much new organisation that is wanted as a new spirit. As Matthew Arnold says,* “ That which attaches people to us is the

* Celtic Literature.

spirit we are of and not the machinery we employ."

The local experiment of fellowship need not be announced,—indeed, normally it comes better unheralded. The less self-conscious it is the fuller and more natural is its life. To strengthen fellowship we need, not publicity, but practice.

To have the ideal of the world-kingdom of God simply and silently dominating the life and fusing the will of any group of people in a Church is a leaven that can change its whole temper. That group may be responsible for the Church organisation (the Churchwarden's meeting, the Leader's meeting, the Diaconate, the Elder's Meeting, or whatever its name may be), or it may be the Sunday School Teacher's Preparation Class, or the Class meeting, or the group gathered as a Study Circle round a leader.

There need be no neglect of the problems of lighting, heating, and generally financing the fabric of the church and school if some time is given to thought and prayer on the supreme object for which, after all, the lighting and heating and indeed all the organisation exists, *i.e.*, the spiritual life of the Church in relation

to the Kingdom of God. In simple fact the "practical" business man who sometimes criticises any attempt at devotional fellowship in such meetings on the ground that it wastes time is—even on the "practical" issue—absolutely wrong. It has been proved in innumerable instances that minds fused by common devotion proceed far more swiftly, more surely, and more unanimously to right conclusions on organisation and finance than do minds that have shared no preliminary fellowship. "To pray," quite literally, "is to work," and to work swiftly, smoothly, and efficiently.

No cut and dried scheme can be devised for the problem of fellowship in the local Church. No "fussy" and widely proclaimed method will succeed for long. If one desires to develop in the Church such a spirit or to increase it where it already exists, the best approach is by a preparation of a man's own life and a dedication of his own will, followed by the quiet contemplation and acceptance of openings and possibilities in such groups as are enumerated above.

A multitude of examples might be given of the application of fellowship through and in the

local congregation or in the lesser organisations that have just been named. There is no problem of the local Church that cannot be grappled with along this line.

The Sunday School, for instance, is crippled for lack of teachers of the right devotion and of adequate capacity. If the problem is thought through (not merely talked through) and prayed through persistently and inventively, a solution will certainly be found. The will of God for that school will be discovered in a richer sense than before ; its conception of its own *raison d'être* and of its relation to the Kingdom of God in the life of the younger generation will be incalculably enriched. It may and will call for blended patience, pertinacity, and daring ; but, if the conditions precedent are fulfilled, in a spiritual fellowship that is sincere and passionate, the issue is beyond doubt, though it may be unexpected and even disconcerting.

The same principle holds true of all the problems and organisations of the local Church—the men's and women's meetings, the finance of its own domestic operations and of its work in the sphere of social relief and in the foreign field, the election of its officers, its intellectual

life in its literary or debating societies, its study circles, and the enrichment and quickening of its devotional life.

There is room also for original experiments like that of the minister who every year takes away to some quiet holiday resort in the summer a considerable group of the younger members of his church for a little "summer school" or "retreat" or "conference"; where they face together the responsibilities of that church in relation to the coming of the Kingdom of God—responsibilities that are, for every Church, at once local, civic, provincial, national and world-wide.

Opportunities for developing fellowship locally lie immediately at each man's door—or even within his own doors! The sustained will to live the life of fellowship despite any coldness or crankiness that tends to chill or break spiritual unity is the foundation of the Church's life and is bound in the long run to achieve the end desired.

We may criticise the Church with which we worship, saying that it is Laodicean, that it is split up into cliques, that it is lacking in the spirit of adventure and of fellowship. And

all this may well be true. But ultimately we ourselves—if we are in the Church—are ourselves bound up with the quality of the life of the Church ; and therefore we are involved in our own criticism. For the responsibility for the practice and development of fellowship within the Church reposes in the last resort upon the individual members. And if, on the other hand, we are not in the Church, our criticism lacks penetrating force, because we are upbraiding that which we have not patiently tried to remedy from within.

It is good, then, that we should in loyal service to the Church deliberately accept for ourselves the ideal of fellowship in it ; *i.e.*, that we should accept both the joy and the discipline of a fellowship which will put us into real association with men and women of all classes and temperaments, of all educational or occupational differences, of all modes of thought and ranges of outlook. This is not easy. We shall again and again find that it is necessary to fight our way through a natural repugnance to some quality which seems objectionable to us in this or that “ brother for whom Christ died ” ; just as he may have to overcome a

similar repugnance to some quite different, but to him equally repellent, quality in us. This is, as we say, not easy, but it is an essential key to all catholic fellowship everywhere.

Having accepted that ideal of fellowship, we have steadily to pursue it in all the spheres of the life of the Church ; reiterating the ideal in the Church's counsels, proclaiming it (if we are ministers or officers) in its services, and everywhere practising it and helping to set the tone and create the atmosphere of fellowship. The obvious place of preliminary experiment is in the social sphere of the Church and therefore at the simply social stage of fellowship. But from the social stage steps may be built up to the spiritual stage of fellowship. The connection between a jolly country ramble of people who have previously not known one another, save across furlongs of pews and spiritual reality in Holy Communion, may seem remote ; yet it is really immediate and intimate. Those who walk or cycle together across the country can more easily talk and pray together in a Study Circle or the Church Meeting ; can more happily sing together in choir practice or service, and finally come more intimately together in

the central sacrament of the Church. If a group of men and women in a local Church does really discover in fellowship something of the meaning of the Kingdom of God for modern life it cannot fail to revolutionise the whole outlook of that Church.

II

The next step in the expanding circles of the practice of fellowship is to-day at once the deepest in need and the richest in possibility—fellowship in co-operation with the other Christian folk in our neighbourhood. The revolutionary influences that lie here are inexhaustible.

The main reason why our plans for central co-operation are often frustrated lies in the lack of real united Christian life in the village and the town. All comity on the large scale of advance, whether at home or abroad, is crippled so long as the six Churches in the country town eye each other with timid suspicion or actual competitive hostility, or are separated by a purely pagan gulf of sheer class pride and prejudice. Yet when the churches in a town

do arrive at any co-operative fellowship, the whole movement toward ideal aims in that place is quickened. Plans are formulated and carried through to grapple with the needs, not of the Church alone, but of the whole life round about them.

The beginnings of such a practice of local co-operative life for the purposes of Christ's Kingdom often lie in the meeting in each other's homes of an informal interdenominational group of men and women for discussion and prayer, around one or other of the numerous and finely-conceived study books on the different fields of missionary enterprise. The great advantage of these books for this purpose is that they are edited by interdenominational committees which themselves, throughout the preparation of each book, practise corporate prayer and thought. These books, conceived and written in such an atmosphere, give an ideal background for the development of interdenominational fellowship.* In some thousands of Churches the

* A *catalogue raisonnée* of these books can be obtained from the United Council for Missionary Education, 8, Paternoster Row, London, E.C. 4, and from the Missionary Education Movement, 156, Fifth Avenue, New York, U.S.A.

mission study group has proved itself to be a living centre of radiant fellowship.

Unfortunately, at present literature is not available in as adequate measure suited for the corporate study of social conditions at home as of foreign missions. But here first-hand study of the actual life itself may be made on an interdenominational basis, on lines which may be outlined as follows.

Christendom is sharply divided upon many issues. But in every town and city in the world concrete wrongs flourish which all Christian folk immediately recognise as evil. And there are definite, explicit principles accepted by all informed Christian consciences as foundations for reform.

There is, therefore, among Christian folk in a town, beneath the doctrinal and ecclesiastical chasms that separate them, a real basis of thorough unity both in condemnation of wrongs and in support of needed reform. Yet those local civic evils of slum or vice or corruption persist, and in only a few places is any effective challenge being made to them, or any constructive remedy being vigorously and persistently presented. It is at once tragic and grossly

sinful that a nest of courts and alleys unfit for the nurture of beasts, let alone of human beings ; a plethora of public-houses in a given area ; bad conditions of labour in factories or in workshops, and many other anti-social and anti-Christian evils should persist unchallenged in any city from which they could be swept away by corporate action of Christian folk.

The major cause for this general paralysis of the Church does not lie so much in the absence of a Christian conscience as in the fact that that conscience is not stimulated and mobilised. The root reason for this lack of stimulus and direction lies essentially in the lack of local fellowship. Continuous Christian fellowship in a city or village, on a corporate interdenominational basis, will bring together the separate flickering lights of the divided Christian people into one powerful and effective flame.

That flame once kindled can burn, not only to destroy old evils, but to light up new paths. The very fact of the destruction of the evil comes from propulsive and expulsive force of a new ideal. But the process once initiated not only destroys evil but builds good. It is constructive ; it is architectural. A new civic

conscience is created which itself sets a new standard for the plans of the local authorities in housing, in educating, in social purity, in economic relations, and indeed in the whole complex of human relationships. If the Christian conscience in an increasing number of cities and towns of the world were fired and focussed for re-shaping the life of those places on Christian principles, the social structure would rapidly be transformed into some likeness to that Divine City of which the ultimate plan is hidden in the heart of God.

What stands between us and that desired result? It is, we suggest, almost entirely the lack of conscious, continuous fellowship in thought and prayer between the Christian men and women on whose hearts the social civic wrongs around them are a haunting "concern." The men and women who are alive to the evils go about their life weighed down with a sickening sense of impotence in the face of the crying need. They feel that alone and separate they are impotent. Yet if they were yoked together in the irresistible vigour of a living and even exuberant Christian fellowship of spiritual communion and "mental sweat"; if they con-

tinually gathered together at once to think through the problems both of principle and action and to seek unitedly for the living power to carry the results into effect, a permanent contribution to the foundation of the City of God would be made.

Nor is the ideal remote or impracticable. Local interdenominational fellowships are already meeting for evening discussion circles, or for half-day conferences, say on a Saturday or early-closing day, with time for social intercourse as well as prayer and conference. Projects that can be and in fact are being taken in hand might be the study of the religious education of the home, the day school and the Sunday school; the study of problems of Christian reunion; the opportunities of joint religious service and witness; the remedies for social evils; the nature of the international implications of Christianity and the consequent new missionary appeal and obligations; the joint study by the Church and Labour of the programme of the Kingdom of God; and the relation of the Christian Gospel to business life to-day.

Let us look at any one of these lines of

development in detail. An interdenominational group may set itself, for example, to examine in detail the conditions of life, say, of adolescence in any given city—to ask in what kind of houses the children are born and reared and spend their life ; in what factories, shops, and offices the young folk in their teens work, and what are their wages, their hours of labour, and their opportunities of lesiure ; what amusements offer themselves in cinema or theatre, on recreation ground or in gymnasium ; what type of citizen at once of the State and of the Kingdom of God is thus being developed. Having diagnosed the general and specific condition of “ things as they are,” the group may go on to inquire what increase of spiritual and moral and physical stimulus is required in order to improve those conditions and lift the level of conditions of life. Having secured the answers to those questions, the fellowship will discover that it has formulated a “ black list ” of evils to be overthrown, and developed a constructive programme of practical reform which may then be pressed on the attention at once of the local electorate and of the town council and its administrative machinery, and

may from newspaper, platform, and pulpit be proclaimed and pressed forward to fulfilment, though, we admit, probably "not without dust and heat."

In such fellowship steady corporate thought and prayer are fundamental, but should always be related to and followed by appropriate action. That action, however, should normally be rather by way of stimulus to local church and civic life than by undertaking permanent responsibilities or overlapping with or relieving the Church or the municipal authority of its own real responsibilities. It is much better for such fellowship to begin in a small way in the right spirit and let its leaven work outward imperceptibly. Essentially it is a unifying centre for those who wish to take the Christian Faith seriously as embodying a definite programme and way of life for man. It is a local United Council of Christian Witness.

Here, for instance, is the "Basis" of a local Fellowship of Clergy, Ministers, and Laymen drawn together by a few men who had shared the fellowship of the larger interdenominational movements which we shall describe later :—

(1) That it is the will of God that we should bring the spirit of Christ to bear upon all the problems of our common life, in such a way that His Kingdom may come upon earth, in our own nation and neighbourhood.

(2) That in this enterprise we are bound to unite in fellowship with all, whether within the Church or without, who look and strive for a new world refashioned according to the mind of Christ.

(3) That to those who are so united in a fellowship of earnest prayer and thought, who seek the truth with loyalty to all that they have already learned and with expectation of further revelation, the spirit of Christ will be given and the mind of Christ will be revealed.

In such experiments, made locally, united Christian fellowship may discover new grounds of effective unity, may take vigorous and revolutionary Christian action, may exercise a practical witness on social questions, and may undertake definite and vital Christian reforming work. It will give precision to those aims and a wider horizon to the local fellowship if some of

its members can from time to time share in the conferences of the bigger denominational and interdenominational movements. A Conference of but a few hours, when carefully prepared for, can be very rich in its results, especially if repeated on a developing thesis. No one should leave the practice of such fellowship untried on the ground that it will take up days of time.

Such local groups, working interdenominationally, may well desire to reach forward to a deeper, fuller unity and may thus be led toward a re-examination of the things that now divide us religiously—sacraments, orders, episcopacy—and may explore the possibilities and discover the practicability or impracticability of unity or federation, of common intercession, and of recognition of “orders.” They will explore and discover in a richer way what God wants them to be like, and what He wants the Church and the world to be like.

There will, also, be one by-product of such local interdenominational fellowship that will even transcend its direct products. We shall discover and find contact with those younger people who are now sickened with the separation of the Churches and with their drab lack of the

spirit of adventure, those younger people who have in such multitudes "folded their tents like the Arab" and have "silently stolen away" from the fellowship of the Church. They have done so, not so much because they are not profoundly Christian in temper, but because they have no convincing evidence that the Church, in a vital, radical, and militant sense, lives and is ready to die to bring the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. When they see Christian folk not only coming together in fellowship but co-operating in a definite and uncompromising programme of practical reform, the best elements among them will be drawn into the programme and the fellowship of Christ.

III

We have examined some of the opportunities for the practice of a programme of fellowship that lie at our doors locally, whether simply denominationally or interdenominationally. Interlocked with these opportunities lie those broader issues of a nation-wide character, whether confined to one denomination or covering the more generous range of interdenominational life.

Each man who contributes locally to the real spiritual life of his own Church is, it is true, strengthening the whole body of which he is a part. But something more than simply local action is required from those who are qualified to render larger service. The central Councils and Conferences of the Church call for the sacrificial gift of time and service in the interest of fellowship. Our denominational Convocations and Assemblies, Conferences and Councils, and less official gatherings for fellowship within the denominational borders, do make a considerable demand on the smaller number of people who have the freedom and power to act representatively. This demand is not one that can be shirked without peril to the life of the Church. For there is constant danger that the denominational organisation, whether of the Church itself or of its missionary societies or social councils, should fall into the hands simply of the effective "committee-man" who feels that all is well if the business of the council or conference is put through swiftly and smoothly.

The archetypal and ideal Church resolution is that to which we trace the whole world-wide

life of Christianity to-day—the resolution of the Church at Antioch to send out Barnabas and Saul on that journey which, in its ultimate consequences, carried the Christian Faith right across the Roman Empire and passed it on to the modern world. That resolution sprang from the steady corporate waiting upon God in thought and prayer of the Church until the Holy Spirit of God had clearly given His will to them. The Church at Antioch was led by the practice of fellowship past the hundred little busy actions that would have been all right in themselves, but petty in their results, on to the superlatively great and simple action of offering their noblest men to the work in other lands and thus lifting the Christian Faith in action from a local cult to a world-religion.

This point of the supreme importance of the practice of fellowship in thought and prayer in the counsels of the Church as a whole is emphasised and reiterated because of the profound conviction that its absence is the source of much of our relative weakness to-day. Our annual Convocations and Assemblies suffer from the fact that they are called upon to review rapidly and to pass swiftly a multitude of

resolutions on the machinery of the Church ; and in the clatter and rush of the whirling machinery the voice of God is frequently drowned, and in the dust of our activity the vision of His will for the world through our Church is often dimmed and lost.

We can set no limit to the good that would come upon the world if those central conferences would—at whatever cost—delegate the myriad important yet relatively little things that lie under their general authority, and seek in fellowship passionately and with vigorous thought to know the will of God on the ultimate and tremendous issues of the world-kingdom of God.

IV

Still farther, beyond the limits even of the denominational life as a whole, lies the wide sphere of general interdenominational fellowship. Here the horizons become ultimate, for in such interdenominational fellowship—especially when conceived as the World Conference at Edinburgh was, and as the World

Student Christian Movement is, on an inter-racial scale—it is possible to begin to see the vision of the whole plan for the world and to formulate it in a coherent programme to which all the separate bodies can relate their activity and their progress.

In all such interdenominational fellowship we may grasp more fully and in their widest aspects the full implications of the Christian Faith for the whole world of to-day. We can in the comradeship of many minds of varied outlook and specialised knowledge penetrate farther into the recesses of the mind of Christ for the individual, the civic, the social, the commercial, the national and the inter-racial life of our day.

We can there (and afterwards in the smaller denominational and interdenominational circles of our more immediate environment) in prayer and thought corporately seek with determined adventure to discover the will of God for us in our generation and to learn what are the demands and the gifts of the discipleship of Jesus Christ. In such a common quest those great truths that have become the traditional lumber of conventional religion or the discarded

impedimenta of a shallow criticism break into new and living meaning. Together we are filled with a common courage to experiment on the necessary new way of life. Without that new "way," which is the old way, we shall never discover the City of God, yet we can never address ourselves alone to search for it. In the wide fellowship of various minds we can survey the needs of the world at home and abroad, and search out the meaning of Christ's will for the life of the races of man. In spiritual communion with men of other branches of the Christian Church we can appropriate the strength of their experience and share their worship, and can in practice here and now anticipate the rich fellowship that will in due time come to a re-united Christendom in an achieved world-wide Kingdom of God.

Yet the world waits in bewilderment and turmoil, vainly looking for the leadership that can only come from a Church that lives in "the unity of the Spirit."

The fellowship of Christendom is broken. There is no Table Round. The seamless garment is rent. The voice of the Church is

silent when it should proclaim one clear, authoritative call, and divided and feeble when it should declare one strong, authentic word to direct humanity up the steep paths that climb from the morasses that threaten to engulf man up to the shining security of the plateaux of Peace.

The challenge is absolute ; the call is ultimate and inescapable. If the world is to be saved, if Christ's glory is to fill the earth, the broken fellowship must be united ; the seamless mystic garment must be woven afresh. That sacred mystery which is the Church must, fitly framed together, grow unto a holy temple in the Lord ; "an habitation of God through the Spirit."

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love ; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling ; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and

Father of all who is above all, and through all,
and in you all.

*

*

*

*

“Till we all come in the unity of the faith,
and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto
a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature
of the fulness of Christ.”

BV Mathews
227 Fellowship in
M43 thought and prayer.
1001701

NOV 15 32 P. O. Norton NOV 29 32
OCT 4 40 R. A. d. a.
2 3 7-18 W. J. d. a.
M. S. Engwell

BV
227
M43

1001701

2 3 7-18 W. J. d. a.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
LIBRARY



10 098 127